Under the Red Robe

By STANLEY J. WEYMAN

CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED.

Doubtless he had dropped the jewels in the hurry of his start from the inn that night! Doubtless, too, he carried them in that bizarre hiding-place for the sake of safety, considering it unlikely that robbers, if he fell into their hands, would take the sachet from him; as still less likely that they would suspect it to contain anything of value. Everywhere it would pass for a love-gift, the work of his mistress.

Nor did my penetration stop there. Ten to one the gems were family property, the last treasure of the house; and M. de Cocheforet, when I saw him at the inn, was on the way to convey them out of the country; either to secure them from seizure by the government, or to raise money by selling them—money to be spent in some last desperate enterprise. For a day or two, perhaps, after leaving Cocheforet, while the mountain road and its chances occupied his thoughts, he had not discovered his loss. Then he had searched for the precious sachet, missed it, and returned hot-foot on his tracks.

I was certain that I had hit on the true solution; and all that night I sat wakeful in the darkness, pondering what I should do. The stones, unset as they were, could never be traced. To all intents they were mine—mine, to do with as I pleased! Fifteen thousand crowns!—perhaps 20,000 crowns! —and to leave at six in the morning, whether I would or no! I might leave for Spain with the jewels in my pocket.

I confess I was tempted. The gems were so fine that I doubt not some indifferently honest men would have sold salvation for them. But a Berault his honer? No! I was tempted, but not for long. Thank God, a man may be reduced to living by the fortunes of the dice and may even be called by a woman spy and coward without becoming a thief. The temptation soon left me—I take credit for it—and I fell to thinking of this and that plan for making use of them. Once it occurred to me to take the jewels to the cardinal and buy my pardon with them; again, to use them as a trap to capture Cocheforet; again to—and then about five in the morning, as I sat up on my wretched pallet, while the first light stole slowly in through the cobwebbed, hay-stuffed lattice, there came to me the real plan, the plan of plans, on which I acted.

It charmed me. I smacked my lips over it and hugged myself and felt my eyes dilate in the darkness, as I conned it. It seemed cruel, it seemed mean; I cared nothing. Mademoiselle had boasted of her victory over me, of her woman's wits and her acuteness; and of my dullness. She had said her grooms should flog me, she had rated me as if I had been a dog. Very well; we would see now whose brains were the better, whose was the master mind, whose should be the whipping.

The one thing required by my plan was that I should get speech with her; that done, I could trust myself and my new-found weapon for the rest. But that was absolutely necessary; and seeing that there might be some difficulty about it, I determined to descend as if my mind were made up to go; then, on pretense of saddling my horse, I would slip away on foot and lie in wait near the chateau until I saw her come out. Or if I could not effect my purpose in that way—either by reason of the landlord's vigilance, or for any other cause—my course was still easy. I would ride away and when I had proceeded a mile or so, tie up my horse in the forest and return to the wooden bridge. Thence I could watch the garden and front of the chateau until time and chance gave me the opportunity I sought.

So I saw my way quite clearly; and when the fellow below called me, reminding me rudely that I must be going and that it was six o'clock, I was ready with my answer. I shouted sulkily that I was coming, and, after a decent delay, I took up my saddle and bags and went down.

Viewed by the cold morning light, the inn room looked more smoky, more grimy, more wretched than when I had last seen it. The goodwife was not visible. The fire was not lighted. No provision, not so much as a stirrup-cup or bowl of porridge cheered the heart. I looked around, sniffing the stale smell of last night's lamp and grunted. "Are you going to send me out fasting?" I said, affecting a worse humor than I felt.

The landlord was standing by the window, stooping over a great pair of frayed and furrowed thigh-boots, which he was laboring to soften with copious grease. "Mademoiselle ordered no breakfast," he answered, with a malicious grin.

"Well, it does not much matter," I replied grandly. "I shall be at Auch by noon."

"That is as may be," he answered, with another grin. I did not understand him, but I had something else to think about, and I opened the door and stepped out, intending to go to the stable. Then in a second I comprehended. The cold air laden with woodland moisture met me and went to my bones; but it was not that which made me shiver. Outside the door, in the road, sitting on horseback in silence, were two men. One was Clon. The other, who held a spare horse by the rein—my horse—was a man I had seen at the inn, a rough, shock-headed, hard-bitten fellow. Both were armed and Clon was booted. His mate rode barefoot, with a rusty spur strapped to one heel.

The moment I saw them a sure and certain fear crept into my mind; it was that made me shiver. But I did not speak to them. I went in again and closed the door behind me. The landlord was putting on the boots. "What does this mean?" I said hoarsely. I had a clear prescience of what was coming. "Why are these men here?"

"Orders," he answered laconically.

"Whose orders?" I retorted.

"Whose?" he answered bluntly. "Well, Monsieur, that is my business. Enough that we mean to see you out of the country, and out of harm's way."

"But if I will not go?" I cried.

"Monsieur will go," he answered coolly. "There are no strangers in the village to-day," he added, with a significant smile.

"Do you mean to kidnap me?" I replied, in a rage. Behind the rage was something—I will not call it terror, for the brave feel no terror—but it was akin to it. I had had to do with rough men all my life, but there was a grimness and truculence in the aspect of these three that shook me. When I thought of the dark paths and narrow lanes and cliff-sides we must traverse, whichever road we took, I trembled.

"Kidnap you, Monsieur?" he answered, with an everyday air. "That is as you please to call it. One thing is certain, however," he continued, maliciously touching an arquebuss which he had produced and set upright against a chair while I was at the door; "if you attempt the slightest resistance, we shall know how to put an end to it, either here or on the road."

I drew a deep breath. The very imminence of the danger restored me to the use of my faculties. I changed my tone and laughed aloud. "So that is your plan, is it?" I said. "The sooner we start the better, then. And the sooner I see Auch and your back turned, the more I shall be pleased."

He rose. "After you, Monsieur," he said.

I could not restrain a slight shiver. His newborn politeness alarmed me more than his threats. I knew the man and his ways, and I was sure that it boded ill for me.

But I had no pistols, and only my sword and knife, and I knew that resistance at this point must be worse than vain. I went out jauntily, therefore, the landlord coming after me with my saddle and bags.

The street was empty, save for the two waiting horsemen who sat in their saddles looking doggedly before them. The sun had not yet risen, the air was raw. The sky was gray, cloudy and cold. My thoughts flew back to the morning on which I had found the sachet—at that very spot, almost at that very hour; and for a moment I grew warm again at the thought of the little packet I carried in my boot. But the landlord's dry manner, the sullen silence of his two companions, whose eyes steadily refused to meet mine, chilled me again. For an instant the impulse to refuse to mount, to refuse to go, was almost irresistible; then, knowing the madness of such a course, which might and probably would, give the men the chance they desired, I crushed it down and went slowly to my stirrup.

"I wonder you do not want my sword," I said by way of sarcasm, as I swung myself up.

"We are not afraid of it," the innkeeper answered gravely. "You may keep it—for the present."

I made no answer—what answer had I to make?—and we rode at a footpace down the street; he and I leading, Clon and the shock-headed man bringing up the rear. The leisurely mode of our departure, the absence of hurry or even haste, the men's indifference whether they were seen, or what was thought, all served to sink my spirits, and deepen my sense of peril. I felt that they suspected me, that they more than half guessed the nature of my errand at Cocheforet, and that they were not minded to be bound by mademoiselle's orders. In particular I augured the worst from Clon's appearance. His lean malevolent face and sunken eyes, his very dumbness chilled me. Mercy had no place there.

We rode soberly, so that nearly half an hour elapsed before we gained the brow from which I had taken my first look at Cocheforet. Among the dwarf oaks whence I had viewed the valley we paused to breathe our horses and the strange feelings with which I looked back on the scene may be imagined. But I had short time for indulging in sentiment or recollections. A curt word and we were moving again.

A quarter of a mile farther on the road to Auch dipped into the valley. When we were already half-way down this descent the inn-keeper suddenly stretched out his hand and caught my rein. "This way!" he said.

I saw he would have me turn into a by-path leading south-westwards—a mere track, faint and little trodden and encroached on by trees, which led I knew not whither. I checked my horse. "Why?" I said rebelliously. "Do you think I do not know the road? This is the way to Auch."

"To Auch—yes," he answered bluntly. "But we are not going to Auch."

"Whither then?" I said angrily.

"You will see presently," he replied, with an ugly smile.

"Yes, but I will know now!" I retorted, passion getting the better of me. "I have come so far with you. You will find it more easy to take me farther, if you will tell me your plans."

"You are a fool!" he cried, with a snarl.

"Not so," I answered. "I ask only to know whither I am going."

"Into Spain," he said. "Will that satisfy you?"

"And what will you do with me there?" I asked, my heart giving a great bound.

"Hand you over to some friends of ours," he answered curtly, "if you behave yourself. If not, there is a shorter way and one that will save us some traveling. Make up your mind, Monsieur. Which shall it be?"

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE PIC DU MIDI.

So that was their plan. Two or three hours to the southward, the long white glittering wall stretched east and west above the brown woods. Beyond that lay Spain. Once across the border, I might be detained, if no worse happened to me, as a prisoner of war; for we were then at war with Spain on the Italian side. Or I might be handed over to one of the savage bands, half smugglers, half brigands, that held the passes; or be delivered—worst fate of all—into the power of the French exiles, of whom some would be likely to recognize me and cut my throat.

"It is a long way into Spain," I muttered, watching in a kind of fascination Clon handling his pistols.

"I think you will find the other road longer still!" the landlord answered grimly. "But choose, and be quick about it."

They were three to one, and they had firearms. In effect I had no choice. "Well, if I must I must!" I cried, making up my mind with seeming recklessness. "Vogue la galere! Spain be it. It will not be the first time I have heard the dons talk."

The men nodded, as much as to say that they had known what the end would be; the landlord released my rein; and in a trice we were riding down the narrow track, with our faces set towards the mountains.

On one point my mind was now more easy. The men meant fairly by me; and I had no longer to fear, as I had feared, a pistol shot in the back at the first convenient ravine. As far as that went I might ride in peace. On the other hand, if I let them carry me across the border my fate was sealed. A man set down without credentials or guards among the wild desperadoes who swarmed in war time in the Asturian passes might consider himself fortunate if an easy death fell to his lot. In my case I could make a shrewd guess what would happen. A single nod of meaning, one muttered word, dropped among the savage men with whom I should be left, and the diamonds hidden in my boot would go neither to the cardinal nor back to mademoiselle—nor would it matter to me whither they went.

So while the others talked in their taciturn fashion, or sometimes grinned at my gloomy face, I looked out over the brown woods with eyes that saw, yet did not see. The red squirrel swarming up the trunk, the startled pigs that rushed away grunting from their feast of mast, the solitary rider who met us, armed to the teeth and passed northward after whispering with the landlord—all these I saw. But my mind was not with them. It was groping and feeling about like a hunted mole for some way of escape. For time pressed. The slope we were on was growing steeper. By-and-bye we fell into a southward valley and began to follow it steadily upwards, crossing and recrossing a swiftly rushing stream. The snow-peaks began to be hidden behind the rising bulk of hills that overhung us; and sometimes we could see nothing before or behind but the wooded walls of our valley rising sheer and green a thousand paces on either hand, with gray rocks half masked by fern and ivy getting here and there through the firs and alders.

It was a wild and sombre scene even at that hour, with the midday sun shining on the rushing water and drawing the scent out of the pines; but I knew that there was worse to come and sought desperately for some ruse by which I might at least separate the men. Three were too many; with one I might deal. At last, when I had cudgelled my brain for an hour and almost resigned myself to a sudden charge on the men single-handed—a last desperate resort—I thought of a plan, dangerous, too, and almost desperate, but which still seemed to promise something. It came of my fingers resting in my pocket on the fragments of the orange sachet, which, without having any particular design in my mind, I had taken care to bring with me. I had torn the sachet into four pieces—four corners. As I played mechanically with them, one of my fingers fitted into one, as into a glove; a second finger into another. And the plan came.

Still, before I could move in it, I had to wait until we stopped to bait the flagging horses, which we did about noon at the head of the valley. Then, pretending to drink from the stream, I managed to secure unseen a handful of pebbles, slipping them into the same pocket with the morsels of stuff. On getting to horse again, I carefully fitted a pebble, not too tightly, into the largest scrap and made ready for the attempt.

The landlord rode on my left, abreast of me; the other two knaves behind. The road at this stage favored me, for the valley, which drained the bare uplands that lay between the lower spurs and the base of the real mountains, had become wide and shallow. Here were no trees and the path was a mere sheep-track covered with short crisp grass and running sometimes on this bank of the stream and sometimes on that.

I waited until the ruffian beside me turned to speak to the men behind. The moment he did so and his eyes were averted, I slipped out the scrap of satin in which I had placed the pebble and balancing it carefully on my right thigh as I rode, I flipped it forward with all the strength of my thumb and finger. I meant it to fall a few paces before us in the path, where it could be seen. But alas for my hopes! At the critical moment my horse started, my finger struck the scrap aslant, the pebble flew out, and the bit of stuff fluttered into a whin-bush close to my stirrup—and was lost!

I was bitterly disappointed, for the same thing might happen again and I had now only three scraps left. But fortune favored me, by putting it into my neighbor's head to plunge into a hot debate with the shock-headed man on the nature of some animals seen on a distant brow; which he said were izards, while the other maintained that they were common goats. He continued, on this account, to ride with his face turned the other way. I had time to fit another pebble into the second piece of stuff and sliding it on to my thigh, poised it and flipped it.

This time my finger struck the missile fairly in the middle and shot it so far and so truly that it dropped in the path ten paces in front of us. The moment I saw it fall I kicked my neighbor's nag in the ribs; it started, and he, turning in a rage, hit it. The next instant he pulled it almost on its haunches.

"Saint Gris!" he cried; and sat glaring at the bit of yellow satin, his face turned purple and his jaw fallen.

"What is it?" I said, staring at him in turn. "What is the matter, fool?"

"Matter?" he blurted. "Mon Dieu!"

But Clon's excitement surpassed even his. The dumb man no sooner saw what had attracted his comrade's attention, than he uttered an inarticulate and horrible noise, and tumbling off his horse, more like a beast than a man, threw himself bodily on the precious morsel.

(To Be Continued.)

Will of a Georgian.

A correspondent sends us a copy of an old will on record in the office of the ordinary of Lumpkin county, Ga. After appointing three executors, he "solemnly" requests them "to law N. Nicholson to the full extent of the law. I impute my cramp colic to his injustice to me." He further requests that "they pay themselves and our attorneys and spend as much as is necessary in buying a slab and place on it: 'Here lies the remains of S. Douglas Crane. Born the 8th of November, 1800, who served five years in the Georgia legislature and never lost a day; and dies in the full faith of the Methodist doctrine and in full hope, to which church he wills $50.'" In conclusion, the testator requests "to be buried on the highest hill in the graveyard with the honors of war, a colonel's salute."

Precautions Against Fire.

Robert Bailey Thomas published his "Old Farmers Almanac" in New England in the early part of the last century. Concerning the prevention and extinction of fire he says: "Never read in bed by candle light, especially if your bed be surrounded by curtains. Strictly forbid the use of cigars in your family at all times, but especially after night. There is good reason to suppose a house was lately set on fire by a half consumed cigar, which a woman suddenly threw away to prevent being detected in the unhealthy and offensive practice of smoking." To carry fire in any way through the streets of Boston was considered a penal offense, even up to 1780, when the restriction concerning the smoking of cigars was repealed.

He Lasted Well.

They were in the family portrait section of the gallery, and it seemed to Miss Golightly that her English visitor was deeply impressed. "Yes, these are all my ancestors," she said, proudly. "Now this is my great-great-grand-father, when he was a young man, of course. Isn't he handsome? My grandfather used to tell my mother that his grandfather—that's this one—was a splendid-looking man as long as he lived, and as popular with women as with men because he was such a hero. Brave? I guess he was! Why, he never fought in a battle that he didn't lose an arm or a leg or something from being right in front of everybody! He was in twenty-three engagements!"—Youth's Companion.

She Made No Mistake.

"It was my first experience at one o' them afternoon teas," said aunt Maria Blake on her return from a visit in the city, "but I kep' my eyes open an' watched the others, an' I don't think I made any mistakes, even if I ain't used to the ways of city folks. I never see anything purtier than the refreshment tables was, all tricked out with ribbons and flowers, and they'd sandwidges all rolled up and tied with narrer pink ribbon. Just think!"

"And what was the ribbon for?" asked the listener.

"Why, I reckon it was to eat—leastwise I et mine!"—Lippincott's Magazine.

Triple Brass.

It has been said that the most brazen man on record is the one capable of asking a cab-driver to tell him the way. The New York Press gives this instance of the next to the most brazen:

A doctor's night-bell rang, and he rose in professional haste and went to the window.

"Can you inform me," asked the man on the step below, "if the doctor next door makes night-calls? I've been ringing his bell for ten minutes, but no one answers."

BACK TO THE EARTH.

The Ignominious Fate of the Runaway Engine—How It Filled a New Mission.

There was an awful crash. The runaway engine leaped the trestle, and lay, broken beyond redemption, in the little green valley below.

Men came and looked at the engine in its resting place 100 feet below the rails that had played it false; but they did not attempt to take it away.

"They'll never get her out of that," said one. "She's a pile of junk, sure enough. She'll be left to rust away where she is."

And so it happened. Red rust crept over the boiler. The brasses turned as green as the velvet grass; the splintered cab fell to pieces and the rain washed off the paint.

By and by the little things of the

THEY NEVER COULD HAVE GOTTEN IT UP OUT OF THIS HOLLOW.

valley began to scurry around and poke curiously into the mysteries of the fallen engine.

"It's the same kind of thing that used to go streaking and shrieking over that trestle every day," said a field mouse to his wife.

"It's awfully mussed up now, though," said Mrs. Mouse. "Those round things that used to whirl around so fast are all bent up, and there isn't much left of the box where the man used to stand. But here's that thing that used to swing on top and make such an awful racket—that's all right. If we could get rid of that clapping thing on the inside it would make the grandest place for a nest. It's so sheltered here."

"We could fill in around it with grass and things," said Mr. Mouse. I think we will decide to stay right here."

So they fell to work, and never did field mice have so fine a habitation, when all was ready; and never were babies so fine as those which grew and flourished in the big brass bell.

The summer went by. The flowers in the meadow blossomed and scattered their seeds. The winter came and the snows fell on the old engine. In the spring a pair of thrushes spied the battered smokestack, and decided that here was the place for their summer home; so they added their housekeeping to that of the field mice.

Down in the ruins of the cab there was life stirring, too. Some little seeds had fallen and found the earth into which the engine had made its mad dive on that terrible night of the wreck.

When the spring rains washed in and found them, they began to swell until little green heads poked out, and they sent their roots trailing downward for food and drink, and their stems upward for air and sunlight.

Then the leaves burst out, and then the tender bloom. A trailing creeper threw its arms over the battered boiler, and sent out its shoots here, there and everywhere.

"Poor old engine," it said. "The men who made you have left you here to spoil. We will make you beautiful."

And so nature crept in and hid the ugly hulk. No longer was it hideous.

One day two young men came through the valley.

"It should be here," said one. "My father was the engineer when the runaway jumped the trestle."

"The company must have taken it away."

"No; they never could have gotten it up out of this hollow."

"Well, it's surely not here now."

After looking around for some time the two young men went away without having found the object of their search.

The old engine laughed a hollow laugh, which made several rusty nuts rattle out of the scarred old boiler plates. The men had never noticed the vine-covered mound under the trestle.

And so the field mice still scuttled fearlessly around, and the thrush sent up his divine song from the clustering leaves. The vines and flowers thickened and wove their network closer and more lovingly.

Daily over the trestle other engines rushed screaming and bellowing. Some-times their fallen brother felt the thrill of the old life vibrate through its fire-box. But every day it became more contented with its lot.

"Back to the earth I go," it murmured. "From the earth was I born, and in the bosom of my mother shall I find a new usefulness."—Boston Globe.

THE DOGS OF THIBET.

Those Found in That Mysterious Country Not Just Like Those of Other Lands.

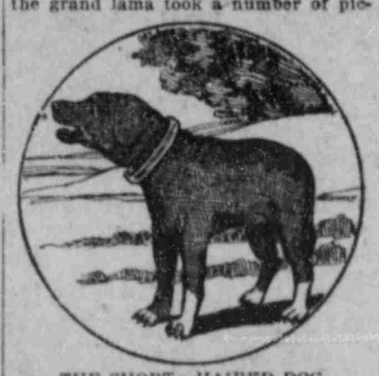
Thibet, which is n Central Asia, is a dependency of China. In accordance with Chinese policy, travelers are almost entirely barred from its territory. The people of Thibet are peculiar; so are the animals.

Bön is the native religion and the most powerful sect is the Gelugha, which constitutes the established church. There are a great many lamas or monks, who dwell in monasteries, frequently called lamaseries. The little boys and girls of Thibet are taught by the lamas.

There are three grand lamas who are considered holier than all the other lamas. Although these men are very difficult to access, some recent visitors managed to get admission to the monastery where these grand lamas live. After much persuasion they also gained permisaion to take pictures.

The holiest of the three grand lamas became so interested that he asked for a camera, which was given him.

After his English guests had left, the grand lama took a number of pic-



THE SHORT-HAIRED DOG.

tures with his kodak, one of them being original of the picture given above.

The large dog is a very fierce and treacherous animal, but he is also very cowardly. He is called a mastiff. These Thibetan mastiffs grow to an immense size and are noticeable for their tawny mane.

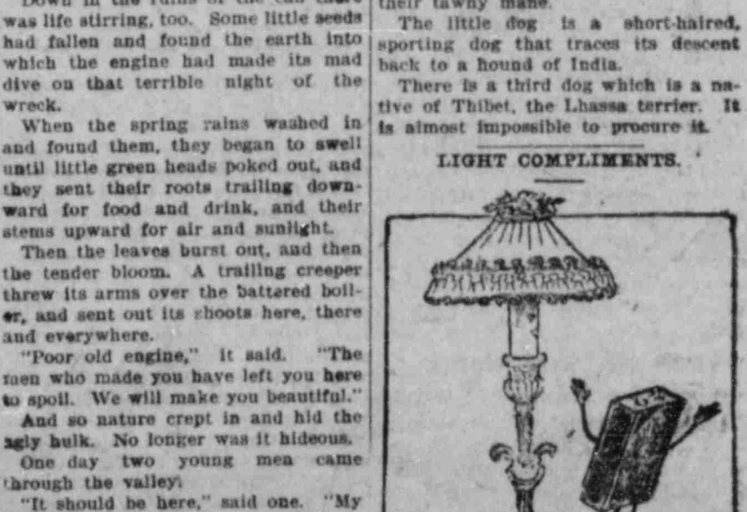
The little dog is a short-haired, sporting dog that traces its descent back to a hound of India.

There is a third dog which is a native of Thibet, the Lhassa terrier. It is almost impossible to procure it.

LIGHT COMPLIMENTS.

Sir Matchbox told Miss Candle that She looked too sweet in her new hat. Miss Candle to Sir Matchbox said: "I fear your light, sir, in the head; And yet it's clear you know the way A striking compliment to pay."
—Cincinnati Enquirer.

An Entertaining Button Puzzle



In a piece of leather cut two parallel slits; below their extremities make a hole as wide as the slit and smaller than the buttons which are fastened to the piece of string that passes through the hole and the end of the slit, as in Figure 1 of the above illustration. Can you remove the string without breaking it or cutting the leather? To do so, bend the leather forward, pass the strip of slit-leather through the hole (as in Figure 2) and pull out the string.—Cincinnati Enquirer.